



# SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

## OceanaGold Spring Peak Exploration Drilling Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Bridgeport Ranger District

Mineral County, Nevada

August 2019

### Comments Welcome

The Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed OceanaGold Spring Peak Exploration Drilling Project (Project), which is located on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent, OceanaGold US Holdings Inc. (OceanaGold), proposes to conduct mineral exploration activities on the western margin of the Wassuk Range, Mineral County, approximately 3.5 miles southeast of the historic townsite of Aurora, Nevada.

The District has tentatively determined that this proposed activity may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) [36 CFR 220]. A proposed action may be categorically excluded only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and the proposed action is within a category listed in section 31.12 or 32.2 of FSH 1909.15. This proposed action falls within section 32.2(8) –

*(8) Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads (36 CFR 220.6(e)(8)).*

In developing the Project, the Forest Service encourages the participation of interested persons, businesses, state and local governments, and Native American tribes at this time and throughout the process prior to the decision by the Responsible Official. The Project Plan of Operations can be reviewed at the Bridgeport Ranger District during normal business hours and on the project web page (see How to Comment).

## **Purpose and Need for Action**

The Bridgeport Ranger District received a Plan of Operations (POO #02-19-02) in December 2018 from OceanaGold proposing an exploration drilling project for locatable minerals in the Aurora Mining District, Mineral County, Nevada. The agency's need is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations (POO) and to ensure operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A) where feasible.

The purpose of this proposed action is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally-administered lands under the General Mining Law of 1872 and with other laws and regulations. The decision for the Forest Service to make is whether to approve the POO as submitted or to approve it with additional measures to protect surface resources. The proponent's need is to determine if economically viable mineral deposits exist within the proposed project area, and to define the nature, extent, shape, and economic value of such deposits.

Section 106 under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, requires federal agencies such as the US Forest Service to identify and consider potential effects of its actions on historic properties. This is done through a collaborative framework of seeking, discussing, and considering views of the public on how potential adverse effects on historic properties resulting from a proposed Federal action should be addressed. The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest will be using the NEPA scoping process in lieu of public involvement requirements found in 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the NHPA (54 U.S.C. 306108).

## **Project Location**

The Project is located in the Bridgeport Ranger District approximately 3.5 miles southeast of the historic community of Aurora, Nevada. The Project Area lies on the western flank of Spring Peak at the western margin of the Wassuk Range and adjacent to, and east of, the Bodie Hills. Exploration activities would occur within Sections 27, 28, 33 & 34, Township 5 North, Range 28 East, Mount Diablo Base & Meridian (MDB&M). The location reference maps for the project are the United States Geological Survey's (USGS) Mount Hicks & Cedar Hill 7.5-minute quadrangles. Access and general location for the project is shown on Figures 1 & 2. The project area is located proximal and to the north of Larkin Lake Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA); however, none of the proposed work is located within an Inventoried Roadless Area.

## **Proposed Action Summary**

The proposed action is for the Forest Service to authorize OceanaGold US Holdings Inc. to conduct mineral exploration for locatable minerals by drilling boreholes at 24 proposed sites on National Forest System lands. The project is expected to commence in the third quarter of 2019, and will have a duration of one year or less.

Approval of the POO would authorize OceanaGold to drill exploration core or reverse-circulation boreholes to collect subsurface samples for resource evaluation at up to 24 proposed

drill sites (Figure 2). The proposed drill sites will each have a maximum working area with dimensions of 60 by 70 feet in area. A 6 foot deep sump with surface dimensions of 15 x 20 feet will be excavated within each drill site to trap drill cuttings and manage drilling fluids. Depending on the maximum drilled depth of the holes and the number of holes drilled from individual drill sites, more than one sump may be required on select drill sites. The 24 constructed drill sites will have a cumulative proposed surface disturbance of 2.31 acres.

It is anticipated that only one drill hole will be completed from each individual drill site; however, based on drilling results, up to a maximum of five drill holes may be completed from each of the proposed sites. Drill hole angles will range from vertical to angled (-45 to -90 degrees), with drilled depths ranging from 1000-1500 feet. Drilling will be accomplished utilizing a truck or track-mounted core or reverse circulation drill rig. A water truck capable of holding up to 4,000 gallons will deliver water to the project from a private source off of National Forest System lands. Fluids will not be discharged to the surrounding environment.

All drill holes will be plugged as an operational procedure immediately after completion of drilling in accordance with Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 534.4369, NAC 534.4371, NAC 534.4373, and NAC 534.4375.

The drill sites will be accessed utilizing existing system & non-system roads, overland travel, and approximately 2,495 feet (0.86 acres) of constructed access road. The newly-constructed access routes will have a maximum width of 15 feet, including berms and spoils, and the grade will not exceed 10%. A single lay-down area for the temporary storage of Project supplies and equipment is proposed (Figure 2), and will contribute 0.52 acres of surface disturbance. The proposed lay-down area will be reclaimed and reseeded during the reclamation and closure process. The total surface disturbance proposed by the Project, including areas impacted by overland travel, is 4.99 acres.

Equipment required for the Project will include one truck or track-mounted reverse-circulation drill rig, one truck, track, or skid-mounted core rig, one D-8 (or equivalent) bulldozer, one 4,000 gallon water truck, one backhoe, one excavator, one portable light plants (including generators), one ATV, two 1-ton trucks for transportation of drilling supplies to and from the project, and up to four 4WD pickup trucks for the transportation of Project personnel and drilling-associated materials, including fuel. Work crews will stay in surrounding towns and commute daily to the Project Area.

Vegetation and top soil will be stockpiled whenever practical in areas where significant soil disturbance is required, and will be used during reclamation of the disturbed areas. During reclamation, sumps will be allowed to dry and subsequently backfilled with excavated material and covered with stockpiled top soil and organic debris. Disturbed areas will be raked and seeded with a Forest Service-approved native seed mix in accordance with accepted agricultural and reforestation practices identified in consultation with Forest Service personnel. A portion of the reclamation bond would be held for at least three growing seasons to ensure successful revegetation and control of noxious weeds.

Specific measures designed to minimize adverse environmental impacts currently include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All equipment would be washed prior to entering the area to prevent the introduction of noxious weed seeds.
- Dust control will be accomplished by watering access routes as necessary.
- No permanent structures will be built or maintained on Forest Service lands as a result of the proposed project.
- Cultural resources identified during a survey of the project area would be avoided by Project activities.
- If undiscovered archaeological or cultural resources are encountered during Project work, activity in that area would cease immediately, the Forest Service would be notified, and the resources would be evaluated. The results of the evaluation would determine subsequent action.
- If ground disturbing activities occur during the avian breeding season (March 1<sup>st</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>), mitigation measures such as nest surveys by qualified biologists and buffer zones around active nests will be implemented to reduce impact to migratory bird activity to the extent possible.
- Work will be restricted during the March 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup> for the Bi-state sage grouse breeding and nesting period.
- Artificial lighting will be downward-directed in order to provide for protection to sensitive bat species.
- Sumps will include escape ramps for wildlife and livestock.

Mineral exploration and associated mineral pre-development activities in the proposed project area conform to the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (Toiyabe Management Plan), particularly the following Standards and Guidelines for Minerals:

*1- Encourage exploration and development of mineral resources and minimizing possible adverse impacts to surface resource.*

*4 - Require operating plans which minimize impacts to surface and cultural resources and provide for reclamation of disturbed areas. (p. IV-57)*

*23 - Reasonable access for mineral exploration, development, and production is guaranteed under the mining laws. The type of access approved will be consistent with the logical development of mineral properties. (p. IV-59)*

Toiyabe Management Plan Management Area 6 direction:

*p. IV-112 - Management will provide for the orderly exploration, development, and reclamation of mining resources in a manner that minimizes effects on range, wildlife, cultural resources, and recreation values.*

*p. IV-116 - Standard #8 under Forest-wide minerals standards & guidelines will be emphasized in areas identified as having highly sensitive resource values; e.g., the Sweetwater area.*

## How to Comment

Written comments, concerns, or suggestions for this Project should be mailed or hand delivered during normal business hours of 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays to: Jan Cutts, District Ranger, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC62, Box 1000, Bridgeport, NV 93517 or sent by facsimile to (760) 932-5899; or hand delivered to 75694 Hwy 395, Bridgeport, CA. Oral comments should be provided during

normal business hours via telephone (760-932-5821), in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments.

To provide electronic comments, copy the following web address into your browser's address bar: [http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=56585](http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=56585) and click on "Comment on Project" in the list of links on the right side of the web page that opens. To submit electronic comments after the period for the comment web form ends on September 7, 2019, you should email your comments to the project contact as given under "Request More Info" on the project web page. Please use the term "OceanaGold Spring Peak Exploration Drilling Project #02-19-02" in the subject line of your email.

Copies of all comments submitted, including names and addresses, may be made available to the public. Comments will typically be posted in the "Public Reading Room" on the project web page unless they contain offensive language or meet other criteria for exclusion.

To be most effective, comments should be received by the Forest Service no later than **September 7, 2019**.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The project Plan of Operations is available for public review at the Bridgeport District Ranger Office during normal business hours. For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56585&exp=overview>, or contact David Risley (760-932-5821, [david.risley@usda.gov](mailto:david.risley@usda.gov)). The project web page can also be accessed by first going to the Forest's home page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/htnf/>, clicking on "NEPA Projects" in the Quick Links on the right side of the web page, and then scrolling down to the project link. We thank you for your interest in our National Forests.

  
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IAN CUTTS

Bridgeport District Ranger

Date

8/8/2019

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(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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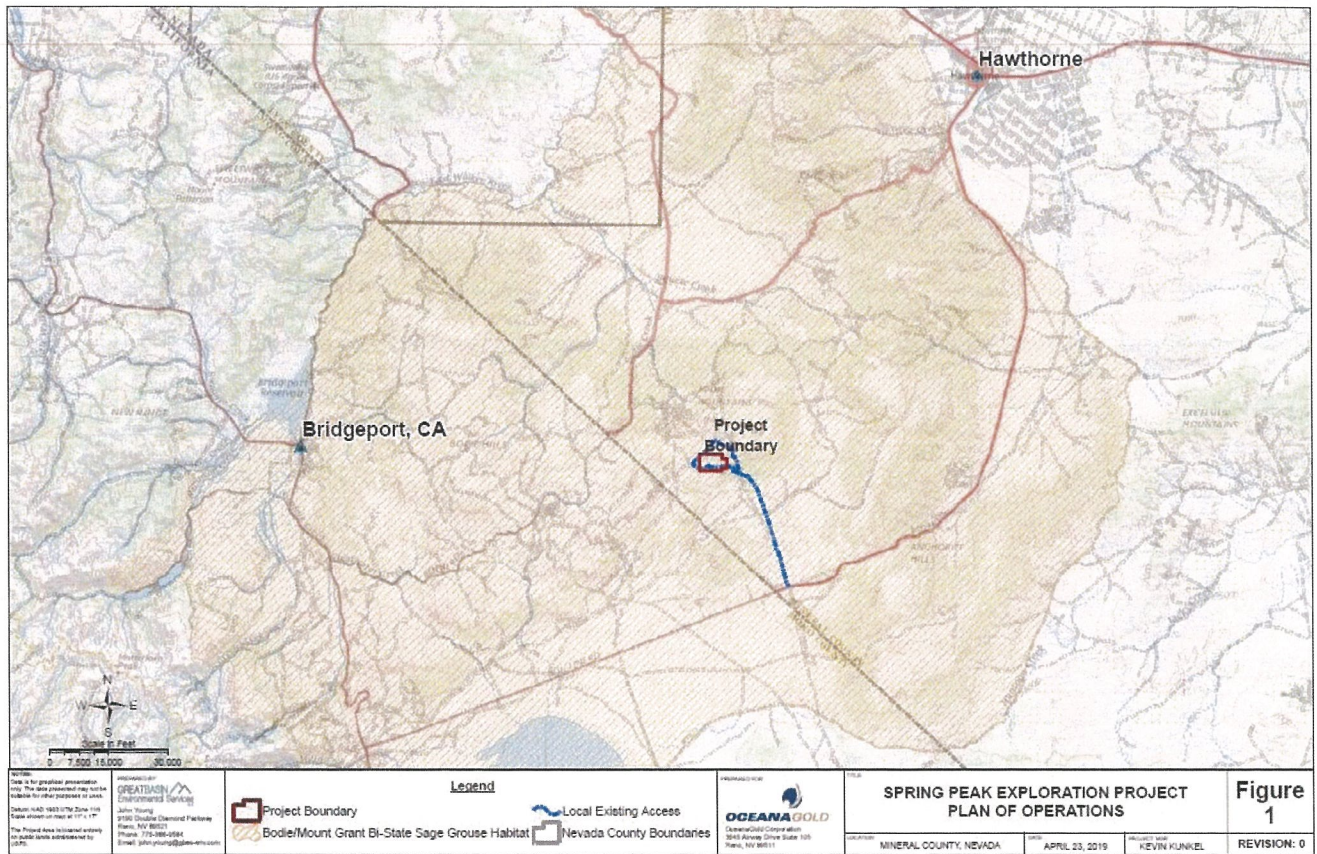


Figure 1. OceanaGold Spring Peak Exploration Drilling Project – Location of Project Area on the western flank of Spring Peak, Mineral County, Nevada, and Primary Access Route from State Route 359.

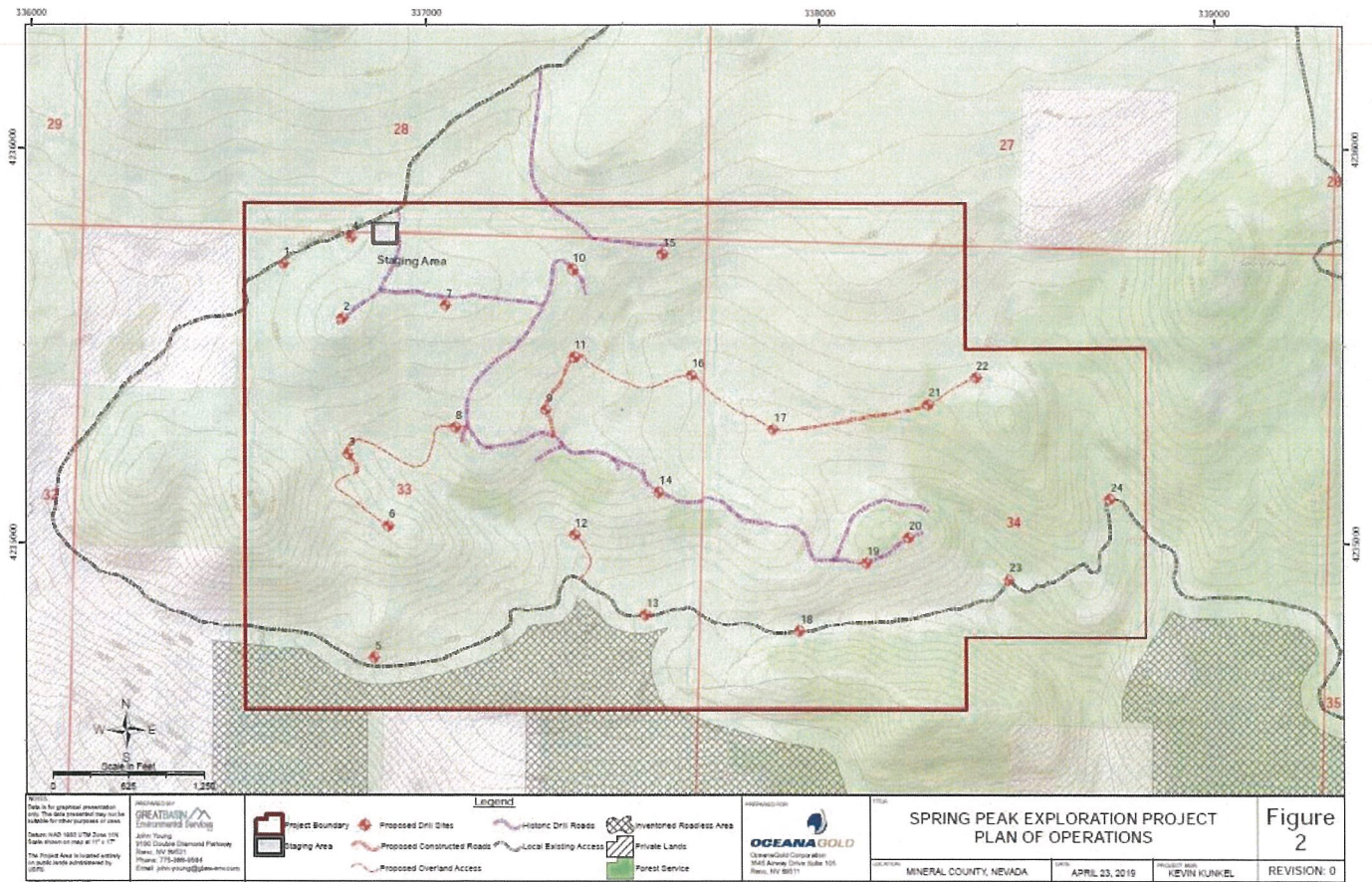


Figure 2. OceanaGold Spring Peak Exploration Drilling Project – Proposed Drill Sites, Existing Forest Roads, and Constructed & Overland Travel Routes.